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ABSTRACT

The current status of school based programs for children of divorce conducted during the 1980s which have evaluated the effectiveness of programs targeted to assist children in adjusting to divorce are examined. Eleven qualitative studies were identified which had been published since 1980 and involved children 0-18 years of age. Information on the author of the studies, number of subjects, grade, time since divorce, and reporters are listed. The overall themes of the studies form the basis for the following recommendations: (1) further studies should utilize a specific set of standardized instruments; (2) standardized measures of school achievement should be incorporated; (3) further studies should continue to utilize analysis of variance and t-test mean comparisons as analytic measures; (4) testings should include collecting information from parents, children, and group leaders; (5) when undertaking such programs, special attention should be paid to working with teachers and school personnel, as these individuals may not report the level of positive changes which are seen in the home and self-reported; (6) further studies should include additional objective measures, such as attendance rates, referrals to special services, and disciplinary actions; (7) evaluation designs should incorporate longer-term follow-up; (8) longitudinal studies would be especially useful; (9) studies should control among measures across the experimental and control groups prior to intervention; and (10) further evaluation efforts should consider the feasibility of undertaking additional secondary analyses of existing population and longitudinal databases. (LLL)

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The Effectiveness of Programs for Children of Divorce:

A Review of the Qualitative Research Done During the 1980's

by
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CONTENTS

Introduction.....2

Method/Results.....2

Subjects.....6

Instruments.....7

Procedures.....10

Conclusions.....11

Recommendations.....13

References.....16

List of Tables

1. Subjects: Who Was Studied?.....6

2. Instruments: What Instruments Were Used?.....7

3. Procedures: How Many Sessions?.....10

INTRODUCTION

In todays society many children are being affected by divorce. According to U.S. Bureau of the Census (1983), 22% of all children younger than 18 live with a single parent. Of these school children, 20.5 million live with their mother and about 1 million live with their fathers.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a research base for individuals who are planning school based programs for children of divorce. This paper seeks to provide such a research basis by examining the current status of previous efforts conducted during the 1980's which have evaluated the effectiveness of programs targeted to assist children in adjusting to divorce. This paper begins by first indicating which studies were examined and a description of the pertinent features of each. The paper closes by drawing overall conclusions based upon the findings of this review, and provides suggestions for considering when planning future studies.

METHOD/RESULTS

To access existing data sources, I utilized the services of the Nevada State Library in Carson City in order to complete searches of: Social SciSearch (file 7) PsychInfo (file 11) Sociological Abtracts (file 37) Family Resources (file 291). The descriptors used were: child/children, divorce, and counsel/counselor(s)/counseling.

Over 65 citations dating back to 1970 were initially produced using this method.

In order to examine the most recent efforts and to focus on those studies which were likely to include a experimental or time series study design, these 65 citations were then further narrowed if they met the following three criteria:

(1) published since 1980

(2) qualitative studies only (i.e. were inferential statistics used)

(3) involved children 0-18 years of age

Despite the abundance of literature discussing the effects and implications of divorce on children, there is a paucity of materials evaluating interventions with such children (Titkin & Cobb 1983). It appears that most of the evaluative research in this area has been done since the 1980's. Concurring with Titkin, probably one of the most interesting findings uncovered during this paper embraces the notion that, although divorce rates continue to rise and the impact upon children is well documented, during the entire decade of the 80's it is likely that less than 15 qualitative studies were published which measured the effectiveness of treatment programs with these children. In addition, the bulk of the literature concerning these programs is descriptive in nature.

Only 11 sources identified evaluations of work with children which met the selection criteria of (1) published since 1980, (2) qualitative studies only (i.e. inferential statistics used), and (3) involved children 0-18 years of age, as indicated above for inclusion in this review. These included studies done by Anderson (1981), Bunting (1984), Crosbie-Burnett (1990), Ferrante

(1985), Fong-Toy (1985), Howard (1989, Omizo & Omizo (1987), Pedro Carroll (1985), Pedro-Carroll (1986), Tedder (1987), and Young (1981). Of these studies, almost half 41% of the studies were doctoral dissertations. 100% of these studies were done with public school children in public school settings.

It appears that during the 1980's there were very few, if any, qualitative studies of the effectiveness of <u>individual</u> counseling with children of divorce. All qualitative studies uncovered in this review described evaluations of groupwork only.

I should note here that another discovery during my work for this paper was the notion that retrieval of dissertations can be expensive to researchers; as dissertations can only be retrieved from a corporation called University Microfilms, Inc. I found some dissertations can only be retrieved by paying a cost of $21.00 per citation. This accounts for two additional studies conducted during the 1980's which were identified in the literature but were unretrievable.

Two additional evaluative efforts during the 1980's warrant mention here. Studies of a program referred to as Divorce Adjustment Project, (DAP). Stolberg and Garrison, (1985) evaluated the DAP project which included 82 child-mother pairs assigned to different intervention conditions. It provided a 12 session component. Participants were evaluated pre-, post- and at 5-month followup. Findings included that the child alone group improved most in self concept and the parent-alone group improved most in self adjustment. Most interestingly, the combined parent plus child condition did not yield comparable gains.

Another study which evaluated an eight session program with children in groups (Kalter, Pickar, & Lesowitz, 1984) reported positive clinical findings, but no gains on measures of perceived competence or teacher rated behavior.

Other work examined such programs for college students (Lopez, 1991). Cebollero et al (1987) and Thompson et al (1984) have also provided descriptive studies of children of divorce. None of these studies applied statistical testing to the evaluation of their model.

In order to focus on the 11 studies specifically reviewed for this report, the overall findings are summarized briefly in Table 1 as they relate to the subjects, apparatus, and procedures.

SUBJECTS

Table 1.

Who Was Studied?

Study Author	# Subjects	Grade	Time Since Divorce	Child Report	Parent Report	Tchr. Report	Other Report
Anderson	84	3-6		Y	Y	Y	N
Bunting	50	1-6		Y	Y	Y	N
Crosbie-Burnett	11	6	1mo-4yr	Y	N	N	N
Ferrante	22	4-6		Y	N	N	N
Fong-Toy	107	5-9		Y	N	N	N
Howard	139	4-6		Y	Y	Y	Y
Omizo & Omizo	60	3-6	1 yr+	Y	N	N	N
Pedro Carroll	54	3-6		Y	Y	Y	Y
Pedro Carroll	75	3-6		Y	Y	Y	Y
Tedder	17	4-5		Y	Y	Y	N
Young	38	3-7	1 mo+	Y	Y	N	Y
AVG.	59	-	--	100%	63%	63%	36%

Analysis of Table 1. These studies involved an average of 59 children each. While all the studies involved children in 9th grade or less, the majority of

these studies appear to involve children in grades 3-6 (ages 8-11). All studies collected self-reported information from the children, and 63% collected information from parents and teachers. 36% collected information from others, usually the leaders of the counseling groups.

INSTRUMENTS

Table 2.

What Instruments Were Used

By Study

Author / Instrument Used

Anderson

- Attitudes Towards Divorce Scales (state developed; N. Carolina, 1984)
- Classroom Behavior Rating Scale (state developed; N. Carolina, 1984)

Bunting

- behavioral rating scale (Hammil and Brown, 1978)
- teacher rating scale (author developed)
- student rating scale (author developed)
- Rotter Incomplete Sentences Blank

Crosbie-Burnett

- Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1985)
- Childrens Beliefs About Parents Divorce (Kurdek & Berg, 1986)
- Child Depression Scales (Reynolds, 1987)

Ferrante

Nowicki-Strictland Locus of Control Scales (Nowicki, 1973)

children questionnaire (author developed)

parent questionnaire (author developed)

Fong-Toy

Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1981)

Behavioral Academic Self Esteem Scale (Coopersmith, 1982)

children questionnaire (author developed)

Howard

Piers-Harris Self Concept Scales (Piers, Harris, 1969)

Walker Problem Behavior Identification Checklist (Walker 1962)

Childrens Belief About Parental Divorce (Kurdek & Berg, 1986)

Childrens Rating Scale (Hightower, 1987)

Child Attitudes & Self-Perceptions - CASP (Pedro-Carroll, Cowen, 1985)

Comments about group - CAG (Pedro-Carroll et al 1986)

Omizo & Omizo

Nowicki-Strictland Locus of Control Scales (Nowicki, 1973)

Dimensions of Self Concept Scale (Micheal & Smith, 1977)

Pedro Carroll (1985)

Teacher Child Rating Scale (Hightower, 1987)

Parent Evaluation Form (author developed)

STAIC-A Trait Scale (Spielberg, 1973)

Pedro Carroll (1986)

Classroom Adjustment Rating Scales-CARS (Lorion, Cowen & Caldwell, 1985)

Health Resources Inventory (author developed)

Childrens Attitudes and Self Perceptions (author developed)

Comments About Group (author developed)

Parent Evaluation Form (author developed)

Tedder

Walker Problem Behavior Identification Checklist

Child Behavior Rating Scale (Cassell, 1970)

Young

Childrens Attitudes Toward Parental Separation (Berg, 1986)

Louisville Behavioral Checklist (Miller, 1977)

parent questionnaire (author developed)

teacher questionnaire (author developed)

Analysis of Table 2. It is clear that a wide variety of instruments were used across these studies. Most commonly used instruments are those developed by each investigator for use in their study. The following instruments were identified in more than one study:

The Walker Behavior Problem Checklist

The Child Attitude & Self Perception (CASP)

Comments About Groups (CAG)

Nowicki-Strictland Locus of Control Scales

Even the four instruments mentioned above cannot be seen to be widely applied; in that they were used in two studies. No instruments were used across more than two studies. Only one instrument is standardized (Walker 1962). This lack of standardized instrumentation and consistency across such similar efforts is a distinct limitation in making comparative statements, and may prevent any meta-analytical examination of these studies. Further, there was a notable absence of any standardized measures of school achievement.

PROCEDURES

Table 3.

How Many Sessions Were Used?

	# Sessions	Length in minutes	avg # in groups
Anderson	8	50	6
Bunting	10	45	8
Crosbie-Burnett	6	45	6
Ferrante	10	50	7
Fong-Toy	8	45	9
Howard	6	40	10
Omizo & Omizo	10	45	10
Pedro Carroll (a)	10	45	8
Pedro Carroll (b)	11	45	8

Tedder	11	45	7
Young	10	45	7
AVG.	9	46	7

Analysis of Table 3. This table suggests that the average number of sessions in these studies were nine. Each session lasted an average of 46 minutes, and the groups contained an average of 7 children. The sessions were most often weekly in nature, and all occurred in the school setting.

What statistical tests were used most frequently? While the instruments used in these studies varied markedly, the method of data analysis did not. To illustrate, 10 of the 11 studies (90%) applied analysis of variance (either MANOVA or ANOVA) and all 11 studies applied t-tests comparing pre- and post-group means.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall themes summarized from these studies form the basis for the following recommendations. These recommendations have implications for developing similar school based programs or planning future qualitative studies in this area.

1. Further studies should utilize a specific set of standardized instruments.

2. Standardized measures of school achievement should be incorporated.

3. Further studies should continue to utilize analysis of variance, (MANOVA and ANOVA) and t-test mean comparisons as analytic measures.

4. Designs should include collecting information from parents, children, and group leaders at a minimum.

5. When undertaking such programs, the data suggests that special attention be paid to working with teachers and school personnel; as studies suggest these individuals may not report the level of positive changes which are seen in the home and self-reported.

6. Further studies should include additional objective measures, such as attendance rates, referrals to special services, disciplinary actions, etc.

7. Evaluation designs should incorporate longer-term follow up (possibly 6 months to 1 year at a minimum).

8. Longitudinal studies would be especially useful.

9. Studies should control among measures across the experimental and control groups prior to intervention. The may be especially important in controlling for the time since divorce, gender of the subjects, and parental permission and parental involvement.

10. Future evaluative efforts should consider the feasibility of undertaking additional secondary analyses of existing population and

longitudinal databases housed within the the Census Bureau and U.S.[12] Department of Education, especially the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988(NELS:88).

CONCLUSIONS

When viewed on the whole, evidence that these programs will make an effective impact on children was found in the majority (estimated at 70%) of the studies. It must be that an estimated 30% of these studies, most notably the work of of Bunting, Ferrante, Fong-Toy, and Howard, reported overall marginal results which were inconclusive at best. The fact that these marginal findings were identified predominately in dissertative work is curious.

A more common finding is that when positive changes are reported, they are most likely to be reported by parents and the child, and least likely to result in changes reported by teachers.

Generally, it appears that teachers and school personnel are least likely to report significant improvements, and may not report any improvement at all (Anderson, Fong Toy, Tedder et al). When such improvements are reported, they are most likely to involve changes in aggressive behaviors and self-control (Omizo, Pedro Carroll, Bunting) and least likely to result in improved academic performance (Anderson). Again, these overall conclusions are complicated by the wide variety of instruments used in these studies, and the small sample sizes in most of these studies. However, some academic improvement among the experimentals was noted in at least one study (Crosbie & Burnett)

These studies differ in reporting pretest differences in the control and experimental groups before the treatment begins; there have been mixed findings among these 11 studies. For example, Omizo, Pedro-Carroll and Young reported statistically significant pre test differences between the control and experimental groups; while Bunting, Crosbie Burnette, Ferrante and Fong-Toy did not. More than one author suggested such pre treatment differences may be due to the wide variation in time since divorce among the subjects, (as suggested in in Table 1).

There is evidence that programs for children of divorce may improve the children's depressive behaviors and attitudes about divorce, especially as viewed by parents (Crosbie-Burnett).

The Bunting study did not support the notion that puppetry and Bibliotherapy may be especially effective in these programs.

A distinct shortcoming in these studies is the fact that none of these studies utilized any objective measures of changes in the childrens behaviors, such as changes in attendance rates, referrals to special services, disciplinary actions, etc.

Further, the absence of any studies which include long term follow-up (more than 6 month to 1 year) may further complicate the findings of these studies. None of the studies included in this review collected any such long term information. In fact, Only one study collected data past 3 months. More than one study suggested that 10-16 weeks may not be enough time for significant changes to take place.

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